

FALL 2024

ENGLISH MA COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

ENGL 636: History of Literary Criticism

Professor Jeffrey Cassvan

Class no. 42462

TUES 6:40 – 8:30 pm (online synchronous)

This online-synchronous course, which meets via Zoom on Tuesdays from 6:40 PM to 8:30 PM, provides a thorough introduction to a number of the main concerns and developments of literary criticism and literary theory. We will begin with a careful reading of a few texts by Plato and Aristotle and then turn to a consideration of the diverse perspectives on literature (including Formalism, Structuralism, Semiotics, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Poststructuralism, Gender Studies and Queer Theory) that have emerged during the 20th and 21st centuries. Since the central insights of theory often arise out of reading encounters (Derrida's careful readings of Plato and Rousseau, Lacan's reading of Freud, Freud's own reading of literature and of the German language, Althusser's reading of Marx, Butler's reading of Derrida's reading of Austin, to cite a number of important examples), we will treat the texts of theorists and critics as primary and will attend throughout the semester to the fallout of what Paul de Man has described as literary theory's "necessarily pragmatic moment...that adds a subversive element of unpredictability and makes it something of a wild card in the serious game of the theoretical disciplines." While we will make use of the introductory materials and organizational format provided in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, we will resist and question the tendency to produce or rely upon simple summaries and paraphrases of difficult arguments and points of view and a good portion of each class session will involve the careful discussion of very specific pages and paragraphs in the assigned works. These primary critical and theoretical texts will often be supplemented with a range of literary materials (poems, short stories, essays, translations) made available on *Brightspace*. This is a fully online course and we will use *Brightspace* as our learning management system.

ENGL 639: Contemporary American Poetry and Documentary Poetics

Professor Nicole Cooley

Class No. 42550

WED 6:40 – 8:30 pm

Our focus in this seminar will be the strange, bewildering, and fascinating field of documentary poetics—or docupoetics—in American writing. We'll talk about poetic texts as well as hybrid forms as we consider questions about poetry's function in the larger world. How do poets function as historians, journalists, or witnesses? What kind of cultural work can poetry do? And we'll read a range of texts from twentieth and twenty-first century American poetry, beginning with poems by Muriel Rukeyser and Charles Reznikoff and a discussion of modernist poets using "official" history and WPA documents before turning to a number of contemporary poets who engage in various ways with documentary projects. We will investigate writing from archives, writing from found material and writing from oral histories and narratives. Our discussions will explore the wide and divergent range of aesthetic strategies that documentary poems deploy, and we will think about how documentary poems use visual discourses, including photography and film. We will discuss how the books we read are in conversation with the issues of our current world.

This course requires two ten-page papers, occasional reading responses as well as posts on a discussion board. All these assignments are designed to deepen your thinking and to help you engage in the literary and critical conversations currently happening around docupoetics.

Poet and essayist Audre Lorde once said, “Poetry lays the foundation for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before.” In this class, we will investigate how poetry might transform our world.

ENGL 640: History and Theory of Comics and Graphic Narratives

Professor William Orchard

Class No. 42549

TUES 6:40 to 8:30 pm (online synchronous)

This class will survey a range of theoretical and historical writings about comics and graphic narratives, while also reading several graphic narratives from the alternative comic tradition. In addition to situating contemporary graphic narratives in a longer history in order to explore how they are in dialogue with innovative comic art of the early twentieth century, we will build a critical vocabulary for attending to comic art, especially its visual aspects. We will explore some of the guiding concepts and principles that shape comic studies and consider the value and limitations of disciplines like literary studies and art history for interpreting these works. While we won’t explore many types of comics—such as webcomics or superheroes—we will think about how comics outside of the alternative tradition call for different methodologies and approaches. Likely works will include: Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, Chris Ware’s *Acme Novelty Library*, David Mazzucchelli’s *Asterios Polyp*, Phoebe Gloeckner’s *A Child’s Life and Other Stories*, Justin Green’s *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*, Lynda Barry’s *100 Demons*, Bishakh Som’s *Spellbound*, Emil Ferris’s *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters*, and Joe Sacco’s *Paying the Land*.

ENGL 701: Seminar in Graduate Methodology

Professor Kevin Ferguson

Class No. 42547

WED 4:40 – 6:30 pm (online synchronous)

An introduction to graduate-level academic research and writing with an emphasis on library resources and research strategies. Students will complete individual research projects and interrogate the writing practices and methods of literary scholars. Recommended to be taken in the first semester of graduate work. Required for English MA students.

ENGL 703: Composition Theory and Literacy Studies

Professor Sara Alvarez

Class No. 42546

TUES 4:40 – 6:30 pm

In *The Rise of Writing*, renowned literacy scholar, Deborah Brandt (2015), shows how the practice of writing (in its many forms and modalities) is not only “on the rise,” but has also been dramatically transformed by our youth—to the extent of shifting how we read. We are writing more than ever before and young people, in particular, are redefining what it means to write. So why do we teach writing? Where did this practice come from and where is it going? And, to what extent do “new” writing practices change how we conceptualize writing and literacies? ENG 703 contends with these questions, as it also invites current and future scholar-educators to explore a number of approaches taken to theorizing

literacies and writing in the fields of Rhetoric and Composition and English Education. As a class, we will consistently engage in the practice of self-reflection, and look to works that centralize and sustain the rich writing practices of our culturally and linguistically rich students in the city of New York.

ENGL 719: Medieval Women Writers

Professor Michael Sargent

Class No. 42545

THURS 6:40 to 8:30 pm

In this course we will explore a number of remarkable pieces written by women that are often unread. Hrotsvit of Gandersheim in Germany wrote moral comedies in Latin in the tenth century, modeling her work on the social comedies of late classical Rome. Marie de France wrote *Lais*, verse narrative romances in French, probably for the court of King Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine—and fables, and a version of the *Purgatory of St. Patrick*. Heloise produced half of the Latin philosophical correspondence better known by reference to her lover, Peter Abelard. Hildegard of Bingen wrote the blockbuster book of theological visions, *Scivias*—“Know the Ways of the Lord,” and illustrated the original manuscript, and composed music, and wrote a medical treatise and a morality play. Mechtilde of Magdeburg, Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena (maybe you’ve heard of that one) were famous across Europe for their prophetic visions. Marguerite Porete was burned as a heretic for teaching of a mystical union of God in which she claimed to have ceased to exist as a separate being. The Italo-French writer Christine de Pizan, a professional writer, answered male-authored books of the faults of women with *The Book of the City of Ladies* and *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. And in England, Julian of Norwich wrote two versions of a theologically sophisticated set of visions, and Margery Kempe wrote the first autobiography in the English language (well, all right: she dictated it).

Satisfies the pre-1800 requirement for MSEd and MAT majors.

Satisfies the pre-1820 requirement for the BA for Accelerated BA/MA students.

ENGL 726: Early American Literature:

Atlantic Ecologies: Race and the Environment in the Modern Era

Professor Siân Silyn Roberts

Class No. 42544

WED 4:40 – 6:30 pm

In this course, we will think about contemporary climate and environmental issues in relation to eighteenth- and nineteenth century literature. We will consider how race, slavery, colonialism, and aesthetic experience shaped British and American readers’ ideas about the natural world, and how we might connect those ideas to our current moment of global environmental crisis. We will follow the circulation of writing, people, and organisms through the Atlantic world to think about how the concepts of “Nature,” “Environment,” and “Outside” took hold, how they have proven so durable, and what we might need to replace them with.

To achieve this end, we will pair our eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readings with contemporary authors writing about race and the environment: these might include, for example, Pequot activist and minister William Apess (1798-1839) with contemporary Kumeyaay poet Tommy Pico’s collection *Nature Poem*; seventeenth-century Dutch naturalist Maria Sibylla Merian with Puerto Rican author Pedro Cabiya’s zombie novel *Wicked Weeds*; Romantic poets Shelley and Wordsworth with CHamaru poet and National Book Award winner Craig Santos Perez’s collection *Habitat Threshold*; African American writer Paul Dunbar with N.K. Jemisin’s *The Fifth Season*. We will read a range of literary criticism about

the environment (“ecocriticism”), including Donna Haraway, Amitav Ghosh, Bruno Latour, and Timothy Morton.

We will decide in partnership what your assessment should look like: I want to give you the opportunity to produce innovative scholarly, activist, or creative projects that engage the aims of the course in ways that demonstrate learning and develop your strengths as a writer and thinker. These might include the following: research paper; TEDTalk; debate; local history or activist project; literature review; or wiki. Whatever you choose, you will contribute weekly to a portfolio of informal writing that you will periodically share with the class.

Satisfies the pre-1800 requirement for MSEd and MAT majors.

Satisfies the pre-1820 requirement for the BA for Accelerated BA/MA students.

ENGL 781-01: Black Queer Studies

Professor Chamara Moore

Class No. 42538

MON 6:40 – 8:30 pm (online synchronous)

This course will explore a range of critical and visual texts that index the study of work produced by and about Black Queer subjects. Through discussion of theories and approaches like Black Queer Feminism, Queer theory, Transformative Justice, and various racialized poetics of being, we'll use this class to think through the historical and everchanging critical overlap of Black Studies, Queer Studies, and Trans Studies. How does Blackness change and complicate gender performance? How do Black scholars envision new queer methodologies of thought? We will explore these questions and more through texts ranging from Alexis Pauline Gumbs' *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* and Kara Keeling's *Queer Times, Black Futures* to Cheryl Dunye's 1996 film *The Watermelon Woman*.

Satisfies the Global, Ethnic, or Post-Colonial BA requirement for Accelerated BA/MA students.

ENGL 781-02: Archive, Memory, and the Latinx Past

Professor Vanessa Pérez-Rosario

Class No. 42537

THURS 4:40 – 6:30 pm

With a focus on both archival theory and method, this course will explore new modes of thinking about the Latinx past by legitimating communal memory, and by engaging models of temporality that do not presume common origins or unbroken continuities and traditions through the study of the multilingual documents and multimedia objects that constitute the Latinx archive. Revisiting Foucault and Derrida's critical considerations on the archive, José Esteban Muñoz's provocation that we consider ephemera as evidence, alongside the work of critical archive scholars, we will reflect on the nature of things, fragments, evidence, and acts associated with archiving. This course will tackle the timely research questions: how do we read the migrant and multilingual archives of *latinidad* that demand a transnational framework? What kinds of collective memory are being made available to address the US's increasingly Latinx future? How might models of a collective Latinx past engage the memory of both oppressor and oppressed, enslaver and enslaved, those who seize land and those dispossessed of it? To some, the sheer variety of *latinidades* militates against any commonality. Can we meaningfully connect these variegated experiences of and with the past, without reducing them to a false singularity or continuity? We will read works that comprise the Latinx past by authors such as Luisa Capetillo, Julia de Burgos, María Ruiz Amparo de Burton, and Tomás Rivera.

The course will also explore the theory and practice of speculative history. Contemporary Latinx authors such as Mayra Santos-Febres in *Boat People* (2005) and Justin Torres in *Blackouts* (2023) creatively engage and theorize the archive. We will read these contemporary works following recent philosophers of history emanating from the Afro-Caribbean diaspora (Sylvia Wynter, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Edouard Glissant), and from decolonial Indigenous thought with the aim to address some of the following questions: What ethical imperatives bind those who coningle truth and fiction in historical novels, or in experimental poems in which the voice is constrained by a an archive that does not come from the immediate family or the lyric self? How is the body an archive; how is space an archive? Some possible readings include:

Tomás Rivera's *Y no se lo tragó la tierra/ and the earth did not devour him*, Mayra Santos Febres's *Boat People*, Luis Gómez's *Mis memorias/ Crossing the Rio Grande*, Justin Torres's *Blackouts*, Anthony Cody's *Borderland Apocrypha*, and Arcaeli Girmay's *The Black Maria*.

Satisfies the Global, Ethnic, or Post-Colonial BA requirement for Accelerated BA/MA students.